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UNH Holocaust Lecture Series Investigates Medical Ethics And Research On Human Subjects

March 28, 2012

DURHAM, N.H. – The University of New Hampshire will host a lecture series, "Medical Ethics and Human Subject Research in the Shadow of the Holocaust." The lectures, which begin Tuesday, April, 17, 2012, are free and open to the public.

"The Holocaust had numerous long-term implications, including how both medical research and the complicity of members of the medical profession during the Nazi era led to current guidelines regarding research on human subjects," said Jeffery Diefendorf, professor of history and Pamela Shulman Professor of European and Holocaust Studies at UNH.

"It is important for people to be aware that the Germans were not alone in the perversion of medical ethics. Most famously, American public health officials did not inform African-Americans around Tuskegee that they had treatable syphilis and instead just observed the development of their illness. For this reason, our program features two speakers dealing with the Nazi period and a third speaker talking about the Tuskegee experiment," Diefendorf said.

According to Marc Hiller, associate professor of health management and policy and medical/public health ethicist at UNH, researchers involved in biomedical, behavioral, and health-related research often face conflicting goals in terms of doing what is in their patient's or society's best interest versus doing what may result in the best research outcomes.

"The distinguished speakers in this series bring some important exceptional historical insights as to what horror can occur when -- for whatever reasons -- research is permitted to violate or simply ignore the ethical obligation to always honor and protect an individual's health and wellbeing above all other interests," Hiller said.

"Whether during war or in times of peace, those involved in human subject research should never allow their scientific or other interests to overshadow their moral obligation to always put the public interest first. The lessons that we can learn from the examples detailed by Grodin and Jones should always serve as reminders of the essential ethical obligations to which all researchers must be bound, regardless of the nature of or the potential gains that they may seek from their research endeavors," he said.

The lectures are as follows:

"Medical Ethics in the Shadow of the Holocaust: The Nazi Doctors, Racial Hygiene, Murder and Genocide"

Tuesday, April 17, 7:30 p.m., MUB Theater II

Dr. Michael Grodin, director of the Project on Medicine and the Holocaust and professor of health law, bioethics, and human rights at the Boston University School of Public Health and School of Medicine

"Giving a Name to Nameless Victims: Patients and the Nazi 'Euthanasia' Program"

Thursday, April 19, 7:30 p.m., Murkland 115 (Richards Auditorium)



Patricia Heberer, historian with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC

"The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment: A Tragedy of Race and Medicine"


Tuesday, April 24, 7:30 p.m., Murkland 115 (Richards Auditorium)


James H. Jones, historian and professor emeritus at University of Arkansas and author of "Bad Blood: The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment"


The lecture series is sponsored by the Endowed Fund for Holocaust Education, College of Liberal Arts, Department of History, College of Health and Human Services, Department of Health Management and






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Policy, Class of '54 Academic Enrichment Fund, and Honors Program.

The Endowed Fund for Holocaust Education was established during the 2001-2002 academic year with donations primarily from the Jewish community of the Seacoast. It has supported a variety of activities, including the Hans Heilbronner Lecture, named in honor of professor emeritus Hans Heilbronner, who taught Russian history at UNH and who served the university with distinction from 1954 until 1991. He was one of the first Jewish faculty members at the university, and his family escaped Nazi Germany after his veteran father was released from a concentration camp. He passed away in June 2011. These lectures – 10 so far -- have featured leading Holocaust scholars in the United States and a survivor who is a Nobel Prize winner in chemistry. The fund also has supported a series of concerts of Holocaust-related music and a major exhibition of paintings by Samuel Bak, often considered the most important artist-survivor.

For more information, visit www.unh.edu/history/medical-ethics.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

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